

MONTANA VOCATIONAL



REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2003 REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR

VR COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT:

To advise Montana Vocational Rehabilitation concerning policy and program issues, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers.

Message from the Council

It is our pleasure to present to you the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council's Annual Report to the Governor for 2003. This annual report provides highlights of the accomplishments and activities of the Council and Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) Program. Fiscal year 2003 was filled with opportunities to review and advise MVR on program issues.

The Council, in coordination with consumers and other stakeholders, presented a unified front in describing MVR's accomplishments and successes to the Legislature, and specifically to DPHHS sub-committee members during the 2003 Legislature. The Legislature faced a huge budget deficit going into the session which made for a difficult task just to maintain existing funding for programs. Because of a combined effort, MVR's general fund dollars remained intact, and the proposed cuts in Extended Employment, Independent Living, and Visual Services Medical were restored. The Council thanks the Governor and Legislature for their continued support for these programs.

This past fiscal year, MVR served 8,031 Montanans with disabilities, and 925 of those consumers went back to work as a result of services provided. The total annual earnings of those consumers who went back to work reached \$12.5 million, with an average hourly wage of \$8.88. MVR proves itself to be a cost effective program that adds to the economic viability of this state. As you read through this report, you will see many accomplishments of the Council and MVR and the Council's specific recommendations.

Arlene Templer
Chair, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council

Council Recommendations

The Council recommends that MVR explore partnerships between employers and consumers to improve the flow of high quality labor market information.

The Council recommends exploring and expanding transitional services to youth in all high schools in Montana.

The Council recommends that MVR emphasize career development, not "just a job" for its consumers, so individuals with disabilities can compete at a professional level.

2003 Council Accomplishments

Each year the Council accomplishes more than can be included in this report. The following are a few of the more interesting accomplishments:

- Council members provided testimony at the Legislature to address proposed MVR budget cuts in the areas of Independent Living, Extended Employment, and Visual Services Medical. Funding for these programs was restored.
- The Council worked proactively with MVR to develop procedures for Ticket to Work (TTW) implementation in Montana. TTW is a new program for Social Security disability beneficiaries who want to become employed.
- The Council promoted better coordination between the Office of Public Instruction and MVR in the area of transitions (students who are disabled moving into the workforce). MSU-Billings developed a transitions website for educators, parents, and MVR counselors.
- Council members worked with MVR in development of MVR's on going top initiatives: The Deaf Center (providing interpreter referral and work opportunities for hearing impaired consumers), Business Enterprise Program (providing work opportunities for visually impaired consumers), and transportation options for people with disabilities.

Success Story

Lisa is a 41 year-old woman who was referred to Vocational Rehabilitation by the Social Security Administration. Her primary impairments are related to a diagnosis of fibromyalgia with additional limitations due to depression and chronic fatigue. At the time of application, she had no ideas about what type of work she could do or what type of work she wanted to pursue. The counselor and Lisa began to meet and discuss work options. She was provided with a vocational evaluation to assist her in identifying her interests, aptitudes, work values, and vocational needs. The evaluator felt, given her high interest in the arts a self-employment plan might be a good fit. She began to identify types of crafts and artwork she could complete. A plan was developed to assist her with completion of a business plan. In the summer of 2003 her products were favorably received by the public and she began to sell them on a regular basis.

Consumer Satisfaction

The Council, in partnership with MVR and MSU-Billings, analyzed the effectiveness of services provided by the MVR program. Consumer satisfaction is analyzed through a survey process, which is completed twice a year for the general and Blind and Low Vision (BLV) programs.

Results

1. I'm satisfied the plan my counselor and I developed met my needs to achieve my employment goal?

<u>General</u>	<u>BLV</u>
74% Satisfied	75% Satisfied
2. How would you rate the quality of services you received?

<u>General</u>	<u>BLV</u>
81% Excellent	79% Excellent
3. To what extent has our program met your needs?

<u>General</u>	<u>BLV</u>
74% Needs met	87% Needs met
4. In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?

<u>General</u>	<u>BLV</u>
82% Satisfied	96% Satisfied

Success Story

Malinda was afflicted with lattice corneal dystrophy, a type of chronic corneal irritation that causes pain and discomfort. Her condition can be progressive. She wanted a career that would work for her long term should her vision deteriorate to the point she could not read print. She decided upon the goal of physical therapist. She persevered through the curriculum at the University of Montana and succeeded in obtaining her degree. She was able to find a job at a rehabilitation facility in California at starting salary of \$27 per hour. The primary services provided to her were university training and rehabilitation technology.

Success Story

Ken was suffering from renal failure and required dialysis in late 1997. His sister provided a kidney for transplant in mid-1998, and he became eligible to receive Social Security Disability Insurance. After his health began to improve he wanted to pursue a career he could physically handle. He applied for Vocational Rehabilitation Services in August of 1999, and started college at MSU-Northern in January 2000, majoring in Computer Systems. Ken graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Information Systems in May 2002. He found a job with an Internet Services Provider at a starting salary of \$12.50 per hour.

Council Members

Arlene Templar, Chair - Pablo; David Boyd Sr. - Poplar; Chris Clasby - Missoula; Jim Daily - Butte; Mike Hermanson - Billings; Ian Elliot - Billings; Don Jones - Helena; Kris Kleinschmidt - Great Falls; Ronald Mills - Miles City; Dennis Moore - Billings; Wayne Nankivel - Helena; Sue Nielson - Miles City; JoAnn Null - Great Falls; Ruth Straley - Helena; Myrle Tompkins - Helena; Betty Van Tighem - Great Falls; Ann Verploegen - Great Falls; Jacob Wagner - Bozeman

Section 121 Vocational Rehabilitation Snapshot

The Blackfeet Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program began in October 2000. Its mission is to develop services sensitive to the needs and cultural values of tribal members with disabilities on or near the Blackfeet Reservation. The project design includes comprehensive VR services, job readiness and placement services, skill training, on the job training, a VR public awareness initiative, development of a community pride project and a recycling expansion project. The program is located in Browning, Montana, under the Manpower Department of the Blackfeet Tribe. Presently, the program has received 61 referrals and has completed 41 orientations. Nineteen applications were taken with eight people found eligible for services. The VR program is working with two of these people to help them retain employment. The program is slowly developing a unique service that will help Blackfeet tribal members with disabilities to obtain, maintain, and/or retain employment within the context of their individual interests, abilities, cultural and spiritual needs, and quality of life.

Success Story

This story is of a single mother of two, who had to leave teaching because of significant field loss in her vision. She had the desire to work as a youth and family counselor. She was provided a variety of services, which included an assessment of her low vision needs, appropriate adaptive aids and training, an adaptive computer system, financial assistance for college, and placement services. She graduated in 2002. She worked with a placement specialist through the Guidance Center and obtained a counseling position with the Boys and Girls Ranch. She has reached her goal and earns enough money to support her family.

MVR Accomplishments

MVR's mission is to "Promote Work and Independence for Montanans with Disabilities." Professional rehabilitation counselors and visual specialists are highly trained to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities across the state. They work directly with consumers to provide individual case services.

Statistics:

- The number of consumers served in fiscal year 2003 8,031
- Consumers achieving employment outcomes as a result of services 925
- Total annual earnings of people achieving employment outcomes resulting from services \$12.5 m
- Average hourly wage of persons achieving employment outcomes \$8.88
- Average hours worked per week 30
- Percent of consumers achieving outcomes who have severe disabilities 79%
- Older Blind consumers achieving independent outcomes 360

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